
Opening remarks to the National Ocean Policy Strategic Action Plan Listening Session at
Portland State University

As delivered

Thank you, everybody, for that warm welcome, and thank you, Kris, for the introduction. It's such a treat to be back in Oregon. I miss everybody here a lot.

Before I dive into my brief remarks, I want to thank the people responsible for organizing this event. Thanks to Kris Wall and Barry Thom for all their help in coordinating this listening session, as well as Roy Sampsel and Portland State University for all of their support and for providing a venue. Let's give them all a round of applause.

I also want to thank Senator Ranker, Eileen Sobeck, Richard Whitman, and Alisa Praskovich for taking the time to participate in this morning's plenary session. And finally, I would like to extend a special thanks to each and every one of you for joining us here today. The great crowd that we have here sends a strong message. I appreciate your commitment to the National Ocean Policy, and look forward to hearing the multiple perspectives you'll bring to the discussion about how we can make our vision of healthy oceans a reality.

From natural resources to national security, transportation to recreation, **healthy oceans matter** in more ways than we can count. My conversations with people around the country have led me to conclude that most Americans share the same vision for our oceans, coasts, and Great Lakes. They want: clean beaches and good jobs, healthy fisheries and safe seafood, clean energy and abundant wildlife, meaningful cultural and recreational opportunities; and vibrant coastal communities and resilient coastal economies. We want to be able to enjoy all of these things today, but also share them with our children and grandchildren, and all future generations.

At the same time, we know that our oceans and coasts are currently under siege from a variety of threats, including climate change, pollution, overfishing, and habitat destruction. These impacts have degraded and depleted our ocean and coastal ecosystems, leading to the loss of valuable services on which humans depend.

To address these threats, President Obama signed an Executive Order adopting a National Ocean Policy almost exactly one year ago—on July 19, 2010. The National Ocean Policy recognizes that—and I want to quote the actual language for you— “America's stewardship of the ocean, our coasts, and the Great Lakes is intimately linked to national prosperity, environmental sustainability, human health and well-being, adaptation to climate and other environmental change, social justice, foreign policy, and national and homeland security.” That's a tall vision: connecting all of those things and doing justice to that breadth of issues.

A National Ocean Council was established to guide the implementation of the National Ocean Policy. On January 24th of this year, the National Ocean Council requested input from Americans on how to implement the nine priority objectives the President established under this National Ocean Policy. Over

the four month comment period, we received thousands of comments, and we have done our best to incorporate those comments into outlines for these Strategic Action Plans—these are the plans that will guide implementation of the Policy.

We are here today, as Will said, to seek your help again. We want to hear how you think we did in crafting the Strategic Action Plans. How well did the outlines take your comments and concerns into account? Which do you think we should focus on as we flesh out the outlines? How can we provide the biggest, most productive stewardship benefits for our oceans, coasts, and the Great Lakes?

We want you to help us determine the path forward in crafting regionally based, bottom-up decision-making for ocean and coastal management. NOAA and the other 26 federal agencies and offices that are involved with the National Ocean Council will continue to engage with you and collaborate with you in this process. I believe that you all are the heart, the soul, the brains, the linchpin, of the National Ocean Policy. We need your help as we move ahead.

I am assuming all of you are here today because you care about our oceans and coasts, and you recognize the importance and value of our National Ocean Policy. Perhaps you appreciate the ocean's role in providing critical services to our country, such as climate regulation and disaster resilience. Perhaps you are an entrepreneur who sees the oceans as a sea of opportunity for new and traditional energy production; a commercial fisherman who relies on the oceans for your livelihood; a surfer, a boater, a sports fisherman who looks to the sea as a place for recreation and respite; or a Native American for whom the oceans take on a unique and special cultural significance.

A healthy ocean can support all of these, sustaining the vitality of communities and economies around the world—but only if we work together. How do we define a “healthy” ocean, how do we allocate uses across ocean space, and how do we avoid degrading or depleting ocean and coastal ecosystems?

The devil truly is in the details. The answers are far from simple, and they will require us to continue pushing the frontiers of our scientific understanding of our ecosystems. At NOAA, we are committed to bringing you the best available science to help inform management of our ocean and coastal resources. We believe that, with science as a foundation, we can make more informed decisions and better plan for the future.

And although science is crucial to informed decision-making, it cannot give us all the answers. And that brings us back to why we're here today. We need to continue the conversations begun by the Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force, and have good open dialogue to identify and work through the difficult decisions that are part of a holistic, ecosystem-based National Ocean Policy. The Policy provides a framework for people across the United States to come together and find common ground, to find ways to keep our oceans healthy while keeping our economy strong. This Policy allows us to be stewards of the world's greatest resource for ourselves, for our Nations, and for our children.

From Portland, Oregon, to Washington, D.C., from Alaska to Hawaii, we have held listening sessions to learn about your highest priorities for our oceans and coasts. Today's session here in Portland is the final listening session on the Strategic Action Plan Outlines, and you can provide us with your comments here today, or online through tomorrow. We want them. We need them. We rely on them. We will use them.

Together, we will navigate the waters of our National Ocean Policy with purpose, with vision, with science, and with passion, because healthy ocean and coasts are everyone's business.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak here this morning. More importantly, thank you for your participation. We are eager to hear from the other panelists. But most of all we are eager to hear from you and get your input.